Suppliers answer demand for 'greener' packaging

But using recyclable materials raises theft, damage concerns

by Ed Purce

NATIONAL REPORT — Next month, Credo is scheduled to begin shipping its 5,000-sku line of hand and power tool accessories in packages made entirely of recycled materials.

The Woodburn, Ore.-based vendor is one of myriad hardlines and building materials manufacturers on the frontline developing more "environmentally friendly" packaging for products sold in home centers and hardware stores.

The more than one dozen companies contacted for this article explained their efforts in this area in terms of doing the right thing for the environment, of meeting an obligation spurred by good will, and responding to consumers who are becoming increasingly concerned with reducing the amount of waste dumped into landfills.

These suppliers also are facing the reality that it is only a matter of time before most states in this country enact stricter dumping laws.

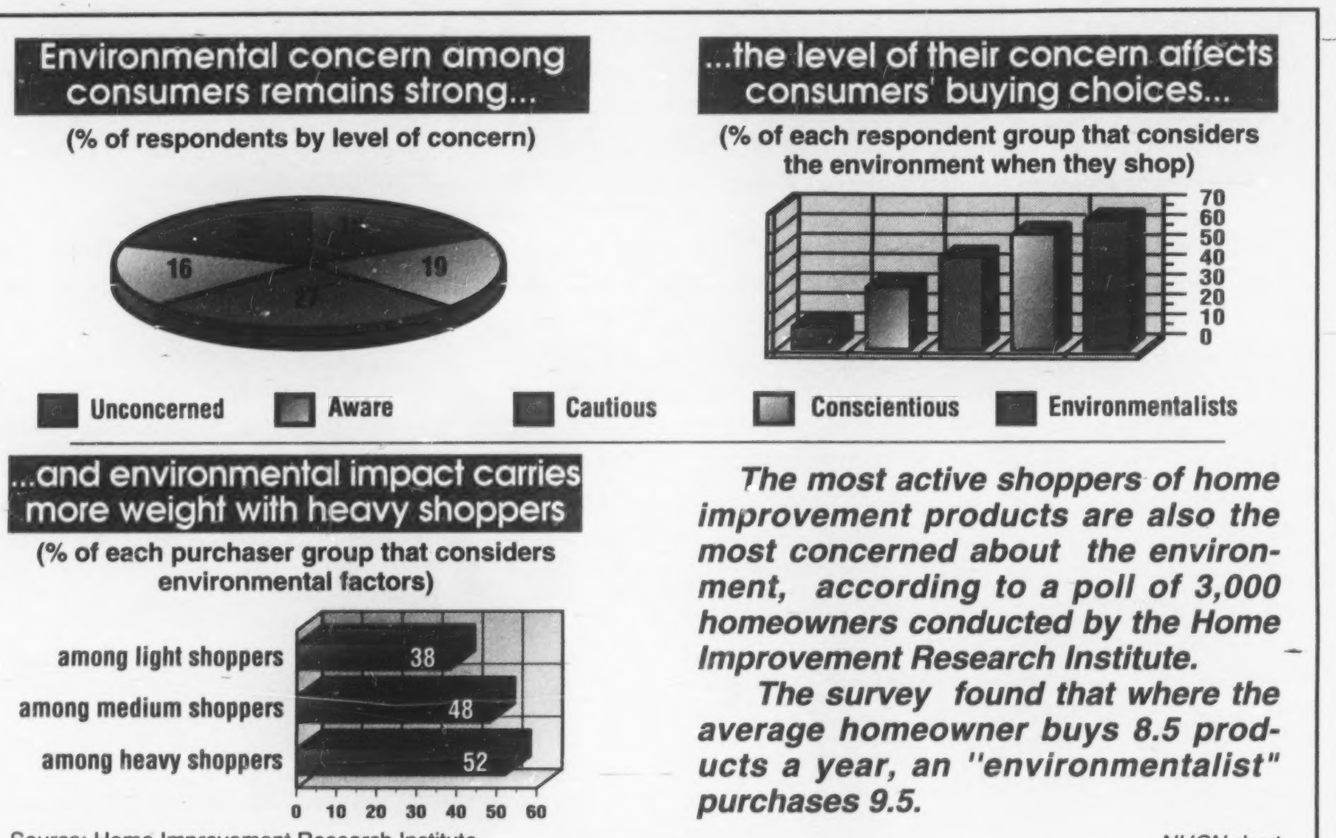
Those vendors with international market penetration are all-too-familiar with stringent solid waste disposal restrictions that are proliferating in Europe. These suppliers may be ahead of the game in the development of environmental packaging for their products distributed in the U.S.

However, going with recyclable packaging is being weighed against issues as diverse as protecting a product during shipment and from pilferage at retail.

Obstacles to hurdle

To achieve its goal, Credo needed to develop new technology. For example, it had to find a way to dimple and emboss cardboard so that its circular saw blades could be merchandised in a package that served the same purpose as the shrink-wrapped package it will replace.

(Continued on page 26)



The most active shoppers of home improvement products are also the most concerned about the environment, according to a poll of 3,000 homeowners conducted by the Home Improvement Research Institute.

The survey found that where the average homeowner buys 8.5 products a year, an "environmentalist" purchases 9.5.

NHCN chart

Manufacturers follow the three 'R's: reduce, reuse, recycle

NATIONAL REPORT — Here's a look at what several manufacturers in the industry have done to reduce, reuse or recycle the materials in their packaging.

• **Vermont American** has reduced by 30 percent the weight and bulk of the boxes used to ship its tool accessories to distributors. The content of the supplier's packages is at least 60 percent recycled materials;

• **Stanley Tools** reduced the size of blister packs, which in turn permitted Stanley to reduce the size of the boxes in which the products are shipped to distributors.

Stanley is also using recycled materials and less plastics as it follows the guidelines set by the Coalition of Northeastern Governors, which calls on manufacturers to eliminate, reduce, reuse and recycle.

The supplier is using reusable totes when making deliveries to one of its distribution plants, instead of packing the materials in cardboard that is thrown away;

• **Master Lock** has stopped using Styrofoam, and is using paper and corrugated cardboard instead to protect its door knob and hardware lines.

The Milwaukee-based company has also developed a blister pack in which the plastic clam shell and the cardboard back can be separated cleanly, making it possible for both to be recycled;

• **Hunter Fan**, which two months ago introduced a new,

(Continued on page 27)

Waste reduction abroad could shape U.S. policies

NATIONAL REPORT — While efforts in the United States to control solid waste caused by packaging remain pretty much voluntary, the future may resemble the status quo in Europe and, in particular, Germany—where laws aimed at reducing the amount of packaging waste ending up in landfills are being enforced.

Germany's ordinance on the avoidance of packaging waste, which became law in 1991, is a three-pronged attack on the amount of packaging waste. The final phase of the law goes into effect next year, and will give customers the "the opportunity to remove and return the secondary packaging free of charge at the point of sale or in the near vicinity of the point of sale . . . "

The final phase of Germany's ordinance on the avoidance of packaging waste will require dealers to provide customers "the opportunity to. . . return the secondary packaging free of charge at the point of sale or in the near vicinity of the point of sale . . . "

The law states that the packaging must be made from materials "which are environmentally compatible and do not hamper the environmentally compatible reuse or recycling of the materials used."

This legislation covers packaging waste generated by the product as it makes its way from the manufacturer to the distributor to the retailer and, ultimately, to the customer.

Having the store more actively involved in the recycling of packaging appears to be where the U.S. is headed, too.

On Dec. 1, Home Depot is scheduled to open a "Recycling Depot" next to its Duluth, Ga., store. It will provide customers with a place to bring separated trash and leftover building products, and to be paid for them. Home Depot is working with Mindis Recycling, a subsidiary of British-based Attwoods plc.

The Coalition of Northeastern Governors' Policy Research Center published a booklet in July that calls on manufacturers to eliminate the package altogether, whenever possible, minimize the amount of material used in packaging; design packages that are returnable, refillable or reusable; and produce packages that are recyclable.

Three dozen various corporations—including Newell Home Hardware Cos. and Black & Decker—are voluntarily trying to diminish the amount of waste generated by their packaging by following the Preferred Packaging Guidelines.

For more information about the Guidelines, contact the CONEG Source Reduction Task Force, CONEG Police Research Center, 400 North Capitol St. N.W., Suite 382, Washington, D.C., 20001.

aging because, for the most part, there is no guarantee that the material would be recycled, so why bear the added expense?

He, like others, said an infrastructure, like the one that exists in many states for returnable beverage bottles, has to be created before the recycling of cardboard and plastic will be effective.

Nonetheless, the time has come to revamp the way products are packaged, said Richard Lindsay, director of industrial affairs for the National Retail Hardware Association (NRHA). The push is on to eliminate, reduce, reuse and recycle the packages that hold the power tools, batteries, home decor products and roofing materials sold in home centers, lumberyards and hardware stores, he said.

The NRHA and the Home Center Institute are working with Scientific Certification Systems, an Oakland, Calif.-based organization best known for its Green Cross symbol, to validate the environmental claims made by manufacturers about the products they sell to retailers. Part of the program, which was unveiled last August at the National Hardware Show in Chicago, is offering manufacturers advice about making their packaging more environmentally friendly, Lindsay said.

He is encouraged by the moves these manufacturers and many others have made to become more environmentally conscious about the way they package their products.

Manufacturers are coming to realize that the day is coming when the "home center won't accept high-visibility cards with the life story of the product on them," Lindsay said.

No one wants to deny the vendor or the retailer the right to provide the customer with information at the point of purchase, he said. But there is a way to do it with packaging that is environmentally friendly.

Lindsay also thought Credo's just-do-it attitude towards environmental packaging is one that should be followed by suppliers industrywide which are finding excuses not to move in this direction.

Manufacturers join quest for a cleaner earth

(Continued from page 25)

unified look to the packaging of its lighting, ceiling fan and air purifier lines, uses at least 21 percent recycled materials in the manufacture of its packages. Hunter also uses nontoxic inks for graphics and instructions on the boxes;

• **Homelite** developed a wedge-shaped carton made of 100 percent recycled materials that uses 40 to 50 percent less material than the rectangular-shaped boxes it used to ship its string trimmers in.

The company is also working on a way to use crinkled paper instead of Styrofoam to protect a product inside a box. The paper is run through a special machine; it is supposed to be cheaper than Styrofoam;

• **Panasonic** packages its batteries and lighting products in blister packs that are made with recycled plastic and cardboard. The supplier is working on developing a water-based glue to replace the solvent adhesive used to attach the two components;

• **Owens-Corning** (O-C) has been wrapping its roofing materials, notably shingles, in a polyethylene that reduces by 60 percent the weight and by 75 percent the volume of the package, compared to paper wrap.

Among other benefits, the polywrap takes up less space when it's shipped: 20,000 polywrappers can be shipped on one pallet compared to 6,000 paper wrappers per pallet, meaning the wrapper manufacturer ships 400,000 individual polywrappers per truckload to O-C, compared to 168,000 paper wrappers per truckload;

• **Ace Hardware**, over the last three months, has reduced by as much as 60 percent the amount of plastic and chipboard used to package tools that are made under a private label for Ace;

• **Olin Pool Products** early next year will introduce a five-gallon drum for pool chemicals that is made of recycled plastic;

• **Plumb Shop** has decreased by 33 percent the volume and by 10 percent the weight of packaging for installation kits, such as those for faucets. It did so by eliminating a preformed polystyrene block, used to encase the product inside the package, and replacing it with a corrugated tray;

• **Moen** is reducing, wherever possible, the amount of materials needed to provide adequate protection for products during shipping. It is trying not to glue plastics to corrugated boards so that the two can be separated for recycling. Moen is also trying to use more recycled plastics and cardboard for its packages;

• **Rubbermaid** has eliminated polystyrene and reduced the amount of packaging for its Sink Sets, a move the company claims will save more than 25,000 cubic feet of landfill space a year; and

• **Dow Corning** is now packaging it sealants in foil sausage pack, rather than plastic, and is reducing the size of the package.

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Circle (019) on Reader Service Card

Rickel revamps stores in warehouse wars

(Continued from page 5)
parity in the home center advertising arena, we have created a marketing campaign to clearly differentiate Rickel from the 'warehouse' concept," said Dick Sullivan, Rickel's vice president of marketing, when the campaign got underway.

Rickel hopes to capture homeowners who are 25 and older, have average household incomes of $40,000, and are interested in less complicated repair and redecorating projects.

To make it easier for shoppers to find what they need, Rickel said it has updated its signage, making it bigger and brighter and hanging it from the ceiling to catch the customer's eye. In addition, the layout of many of the stores has been revamped; the aisles are wider and departments are grouped by category. The product line has also been expanded, most notably lighting products and faucets and sinks.

The television and radio spots went on the air in April; the circulars went out at the end of August. The campaign will run through the fall, take a winter hiatus and resume with fresh commercials in the spring, said Bruce Wagoner, vice president and management supervisor for Pedone & Partners, the New York advertising firm that worked with Rickel.

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Sullivan, who played a role in developing the new marketing strategy, will not be with Rickel when the new commercials are aired. He recently joined Home Depot, one of the warehouse stores Rickel was differentiating itself from.

He had been vice president of marketing at Rickel since 1990.

Sullivan, 36, will be vice president of advertising, a newly created position at the top home center chain, which is based in Atlanta. In this capacity, he will be responsible for all advertising functions including production, agency relations, media and co-op advertising.

"We're enthused" about Sullivan joining Home Depot, Richard Hammill, senior vice president of marketing and advertising, said in a press release. "We will benefit from his expertise as the Home Depot continues to grow." Home Depot has 191 stores and hopes to triple that number by 1996.

National merger could broaden builder focus

(Continued from page 1)
counter market. Its sales were $25 million from retail operations and $10 million from wholesaling last year, according to BWA president Joe McCartney.

In 1991, National had sales of $70 million from five stores.

Under a preliminary scenario for merger, BWA would operate under the National banner with Newman as president of the combined company. BWA would be a separate division with McCartney as president. If the merger is consummated, McCartney expects the new company to file for listing on the American Stock Exchange.

"We're a long way from anything, but it's our intention to pursue it," Newman said of the merger.

The two operations differ in size and scope. BWA, founded by McCartney, a former Wickes Lumber manager, operates stores that average 5,000 square feet in retail space with 100,000- to 110,000-square-foot warehouses.

They carry 1,800 contractor-oriented stockkeeping units, including heating and ventilation and paint lines, but no plumbing or electricals. In addition to the main store in Conway, it operates units in Bentonville, Parks, Clarkville and Harrison, Ark.

National, which acquired its sixth store in Bentonville in June, has an average store size of 38,000 square feet with 18,000 skus. Its sales are split almost evenly between DIY or retail sales and builder business. It operates one superstore in North Little Rock, which is 90,000 square feet of retail space and 150,000 square feet of warehouse space.

Newman said regardless of the merger, it plans to add 180,000 to 230,000 square feet of new retail space next year with stores in West Little Rock, Conway and another unnamed location. In addition to Bentonville and North Little Rock, National currently operates in Fort Smith, Little Rock, Rogers and Springdale.

Company Index

Ace Hardware....17,20,27
American Iron and Steel Institute....8
American Tool Co....26
Anderson Lumber....22
Angelus Metal Systems....8
Apex Lumber Mart....31
Apple Computer....13
Attwoods plc....25
Black & Decker....22,25
Boise Cascade....2
B&Q....28
Builders Square....5,22
Builders Warehouse Association....1,32
Champion International Corp....2
Channel....2
CIT Business Credit....2
Clorox....6
Coleman Homes....1,8
Coneg Source Reduction Task Force....25
Cotter & Co....1
Credo....25,26,27
Dean & Barry Co....17,22
DeWalt Industrial Tool Co....2
Dixieland Lumber....8,20
Dow Corning....27
84 Lumber....8
Expo....1
Fairfax Lumber & Hardware Co....8
Federal Trade Commission....6
Forestry Stewardship Council....28
Fullmer Lumber....15
General Electric....2,5
Georgia Pacific....2
Glidden....6
Grossman's....1,2,12
Hader Hardware....22
Hallmark Paint....22
Hancock Lumber....2
Hardlines Marketing Inc....2
Hechinger....31
Hewlett-Packard....13
Lowe's....12
Hill Behan Lumber Co....2
Hobart Lumber ServiStar....31
HomeBase....12
Home Center Institute....27
Home Depot....1,8,22,25,31,32
Home Improvement Research Institute....25
Home Improvement Industry Affordable Housing Coalition....6
Homelite....27
Home Quarters Warehouse....22
Hudson England....22
Hunt Plywood Co....2
Hunter....27
Hunter Fan....25
Innovative Formulations....6
Kohler Co....17,20
Kyle Co....2
Lanoga Corp....12
Leeds Building Products....2
Louisiana Pacific Corp....2
MacArthur Foundation....28
Majestic Paint Centers....22
Makita....31
Malden Timber....15,31
Master Lock....25,26
MasterCard....5
Medis Recycling....25
MirrorSeal....6
Moen....27
National Association of Home Builders....8
National Forest Products Association....15
National Home Centers....1,32
National Retail Hardware Association....12,27
Newell Home Hardware Cos....25
Norbord Industries....2
Northwood Panelboard Co....2
Olin Pool....26,27
Owens-Corning....27
PakMix....2
Panasonic....27
Payless Cashways....6,12
Pedone & Partners....32
Pennington Seed....2
Plumb Shop....26,27
Plumbing Manufacturers Institute....20
Price Pfister....17,20
Quikrete....22
R.D. Werner....2
Red Devil....17
Residential Steel Framing....8
Rickel....2,5,22,32
Riverwood International Corp....2
RM Inc....2
Rubbermaid....27
Russell/Packard Development....8
Scientific Certification Systems....27
Scotty's....22
Sebago Pacific....2
Serendipity....5
ServiStar....2,5,31
Smitty's Lumberteria....2
Stanley Tools....25,26
States Industries....2
Sterling Faucet....17,20
Strober Brothers Lumber....8
Super-Valu Inc....2
Sutherland Lumber....1
Thermos....2
Thomas Hammond & Son....2
Union Camp Corp....2
UnionTools....2
Vermont American....25
Western Metal Lath....8
Western Wood Products Association....8
Weyerhaeuser....2,15
Whirlpool....13
Wickes Lumber....2,32
Wickes plc....15,31
Williamette Industries....2
W.R. Bonsal....22

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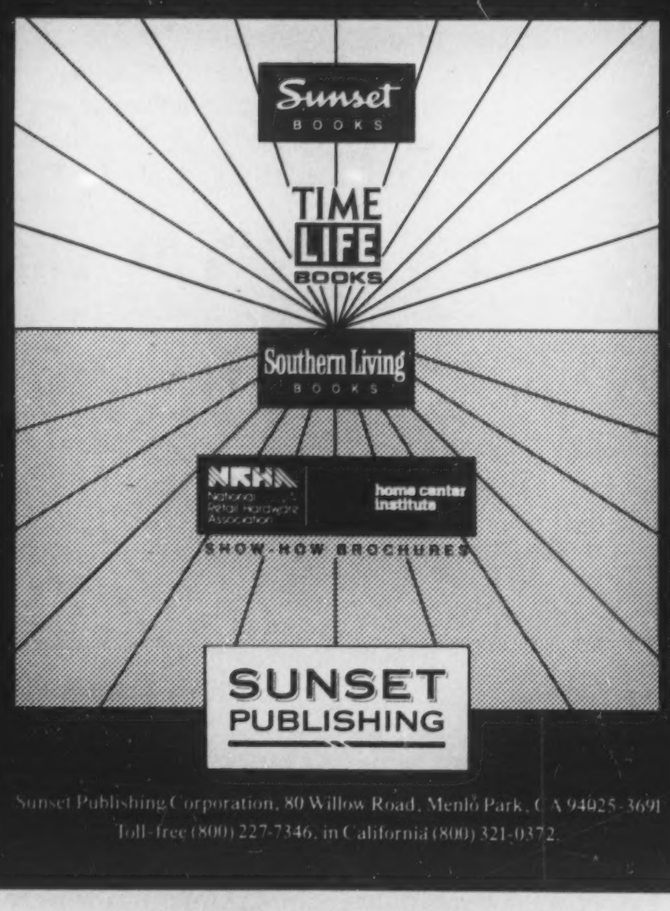

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Circle (023) on Reader Service Card

Advertisers Index

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Boldface denotes reader service number

American Stone Mix*....14A-D, **008**
Briggs & Stratton....4, **002**
Dow Chemical....9,10, **005**
Eljer....3, **001**
Fluid Management....28, **022**
Georgia Pacific....18,19, **012**
Handy Home Products....24, **018**
Hewlett....14
Interbath....16, **011**
Jones-Blair....23, **017**
Kingsford Products....7, **003**
Knape & Vogt....33, **024**
Louisiana Pacific....34, **025**
Macco Adhesives....20, **013**
Macco Adhesives....20, **014**
Makiki....15, **009**
Moen Group....26,27, **019**
National Manufacturing....28, **021**
Olham Saw....8, **004**
Price Pfister....21, **015**
R&G Sloane....22, **016**
Sunset Publishing....32, **023**
Whittier Wood....28, **020**
Wooster Brush....15, **010**

* Asterisk indicates regional ad.

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